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Soviet Diplomat Said Menaced By CIA Agents

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A Soviet charge that American Central Intelligence agents threatened to kill a Russian diplomat in New York who balked when two men attempted to recruit him as a double-agent is the latest episode in the Washington-Moscow chill.

The accusation surfaced this week in a dramatic cloak-and-dagger article in the Soviet publication, *Literaturnya Gazeta*, or *Literary Gazette*.

The weekly, the official organ of the Soviet Writers' Union, in May printed widely published accusations that three American correspondents based in Moscow worked for the Central Intelligence Agency. Those charges were angrily denied by the newsmen.

The newest allegation concerns a more classic form of intelligence work, recruiting double-agents. Many nations do so, but they publicly air it only infrequently—and for ulterior motives.

What makes the *Literary Gazette's* charge unusual are its colorful and detailed allegations. To the CIA, the ulterior motive of Soviet intelligence in this case is to piggyback on the tide of criticisms that has rolled over the agency in the United States and abroad.

The CIA on Tuesday declined comment on the *Literary Gazette's* accusation of a frustrated New York recruitment plot. In answer to further inquiries yesterday, a CIA spokesman said:

"They're getting a free ride on the three initials (CIA); I wouldn't dignify this rubbish with any comment."

Was there any truth to the Soviet accusation? After three days of inquiry, no one would say so outright. But neither would any agency of the U.S. government issue an official denial of the entire Soviet account.

Privately, however, informed sources in the administration said the CIA was getting "a bum rap." Their intended implication was that the CIA was not the agency involved. Officials would say only that surveillance of Soviet diplomats in this country is under control of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, not the CIA.

The FBI has referred all inquiries to the State Department. The State Department, in turn, has denied a portion of the *Literary Gazette* accusation, but not the central point — whether an attempt was made to recruit a Soviet diplomat for counter-intelligence.

Instead, the State Department acknowledged that the Soviet Foreign Ministry last week formerly protested what it called a "provocation" against Oleg Vasilyevich Kharchenko.

Kharchenko, the center of the *Literary Gazette* accusation, was a personal assistant to the chief Soviet delegate to the United Nations, Yakov A. Malik.

According to the Soviet publication, Kharchenko hurriedly left New York on July 18. The *Gazette* charged that, two days earlier, two CIA agents, identified only as "Mr. Bryant" and "Bob," suggested he might never leave the Hilton Hotel, where they talked with him, except "through the window" if he refused "to cooperate."

In the *Gazette's* account, Kharchenko was told by the two alleged CIA agents that "they had 'enough ways of spoiling his career.' 'Even of breaking it,' Bob promised with a smile."

Their last warning words to Kharchenko, according to the *Gazette*, were, "You have until 19, Monday July to think it over." And added: "So as you say: In Russia, 'until Monday!' 'Until Monday!' Kharchenko reassured him."

Kharchenko left New York for Moscow a day earlier, Sunday.

In response to repeated inquiries, the State Department has limited itself to saying that "our policy is not to comment on such allegations," except in this case to "note that the official protest by the Soviet Foreign Ministry does not allege a threat against Mr. Kharchenko" as *Literary Gazette* charged.

On the key issue of whether an intelligence recruiting attempt was made by any U.S. agency, the State Department is silent. The whole episode, said one administration official, is "a tempest in a teapot," and "highly dramatized" at that.

"After all," said another, "this kind of counter-intelligence contact is not unusual, it is 'legitimate' —but of course I'm not confirming that it happened."